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HERALD NEWS

No uranium, no weapons and no answers

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Friday, July 18, 2003

EDITORIAL BY THE HERALD NEWS

What did the president know and when did he know it? They sound like questions aimed at President Nixon in the Watergate scandal. It is not a case of déjà vu all over again, but the controversy surrounding President Bush's assertion in the State of the Union address that Iraq was trying to buy uranium in Africa has raised serious concerns about whether other presidential statements on Iraq were true. American troops continue to be killed in post-war Iraq - a term quickly becoming an oxymoron. Americans have a right to know if the reasons cited for the military invasion were based on fact. Unfortunately, a Republican-led Senate has blocked the way.

On Wednesday, Sen. Jon Corzine, D-Hoboken, introduced an amendment to a \$386.6 billion defense bill that would have created an independent, bipartisan commission to study the intelligence used to advocate the war in Iraq. Corzine said on the Senate floor that the American people, as well as U.S. allies, will "lose confidence" in U.S. intelligence unless a thorough review is made. He said, "Simply put, the nation's credibility, in my view, is at stake." Corzine is correct.

Democrats see the first major chink in the wall surrounding a popular president. However, Corzine's amendment is not partisan as Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, claims. Corzine told the Herald News on Thursday that the purpose of the amendment was to "de-politicize" the controversy. Stevens, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, didn't see it that way. He said, "This is an attempt to smear the president of the United States, and I shall not permit that if I can avoid it." Corzine described Stevens' remarks as "over the top."

Stevens' party loyalty is duly noted. But a bipartisan commission would not be a free pass to smear Bush. It would provide the American people with some answers.

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CIA Director George J. Tenet willingly became the administration's whipping boy, accepting ultimate responsibility for the error. That still does not answer the question, "How did bogus intelligence get into the president's speech?" It does not explain why no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq or why no link between Iraq and al-Qaeda has been proved. Corzine's proposed commission would have found those answers and more. But it went down to defeat by a 51-45 vote.

Republicans also criticized the proposed commission as inappropriate while U.S. troops are still in Iraq. When is it appropriate? After more Americans are killed?



British Prime Minister Tony Blair's address to Congress did not bolster the Republican's position. Alluding to the claim that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, Blair said, "Let us say one thing. If we are wrong, we will have destroyed a threat that at its least is responsible for inhumane carnage and suffering. That is something I am confident history will forgive." That may be noble. That may be accurate. But the American public was told that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. Support for the invasion was based on Iraq's WMD as fact. There was no possibility of "if we are wrong."

U.S. credibility is on the line; U.S. troops literally are on the line.

"If you are going to live in a world where the option of pre-emptive force is on the table" then our intelligence must be "credible" and carried out with "integrity," Corzine said on Thursday.

That is sound foreign policy. The American people need answers. Too bad the Senate doesn't feel the same way.

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